

Tells Chamber Small Business is Backbone of Country

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-MARIA SCANDALE

On small business aid, the Causeway Bridge repair, beach replenishment and aquaculture, newly instated Congressman John Adler told business leaders Tuesday that he was working with officials on those issues to "get it right." Addressing more than 80 businesspeople at a Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce luncheon, Adler (D-3rd) also invited input, especially by e-mail.

"I'm working hard with the people in this room to try to make sure that as the government does its small part to revive our economy, it's not reviving the economy in California or Texas, and leaving out Ocean County," said Adler, a member of the House Financial Services Committee.

A whirlwind pre-lunch sweep through the business crowd has yielded stories such as that of a cabinet company owner relating a hard decision to lay off all 13 employees the first week of this winter when January showed nearly no business scheduled.

"Yet, at the end of this quarter, this quarter almost matched what he did (during the same time frame) in 2008," Adler said, nurturing bits of optimism for his audience in much the same cautious tone President Obama had last week.

"That's an encouraging sign. There are signs like that all around, that capitalism is going to survive, that America is going to survive, that we're going to be OK.

"I say that not causally, because I understand that here in the country, unemployment is too high, and there are businesses that have closed or are on the brink of closure, or face layoffs, or where their profits are very low, or they're upside down financially."

Although the federal government "missed lots of opportunities" in economy recovery aid, "the good news is, with housing, I think we have hit bottom, or are at least close enough to where we can see bottom," Adler said, noting that housing sales are coming up, and people are refinancing through low interest rates.

Credit-worthy borrowers are starting to get money again, Adler added. A health food store owner asked later what is going on with proposals to help small businesses.

Two things are in progress: "very large tax cuts for small businesses" in the stimulus plan, and more loan money available through a more "business-friendly" Small Business Administration, Adler said.

"Is there more we can do? Yes. One thing we can do right away- and I'm hoping we can do it this year- is to find ways healthcare reform to bring down the costs of covering the owners of the business," said Adler.

Chamber President Dave Taylor said his health insurance costs went up 26 percent this year. Adler would be satisfied to see those increases hold to 5 percent per year, he said.

"When I was campaigning last year, I told the story many times of my father, who owned a small dry cleaning business where I grew up in Haddonfield. He couldn't afford insurance. Then he had a heart attack and realized the value of insurance, but by then it was too late.

"He got out of the hospital too soon because the bills were more than he could afford and he went back to work, had another heart attack. It was a pre-existing condition and he couldn't get insurance at that point. He had a couple of heart attacks, he died, we lost the family business, almost lost my family home," Adler continued. For many other folks, "that's still happening now in 2009."

Noting that his area doesn't have big business to rely upon, Adler said "We are a small-business economy, and the folks represented in this room are the backbone of our country."

Beach Replenishment Gets Unexpected Hearing

Chamber Executive Director Rick Reynolds asked Adler what he had heard about the Executive Branch's feeling on beach replenishment. The background is that at the end of March, the White House Office of Management and Budget recommended pulling the plug on beach replenishment funding.

Adler responded with an upbeat development based on a well-placed promo by fellow New Jersey Democratic Congressman Frank Pallone "The most recent time that President Obama came to speak to the House Democrats, our neighbor to the north, Frank Pallone, made a really good point. When President Obama was talking about going to Europe and fixing financial stimulus and how we've got to get credit flowing again to make the world safe, Frank Pallone got up and said, 'I have a really important economic issue.' People in the room, except for me, thought he was talking about- well, he talked about beach replenishment. And the president said, 'Uh, we'll have to rethink that.'"

First of all, short-term funding is in place for beach renourishment in the current appropriations budget, Adler reiterated. Still, "it was troubling to hear rumblings that the federal government through OMB didn't want to fund beach replenishment issues on an ongoing basis."

Returning to the upbeat, Adler pledged "I'm confident if there's any ongoing executive branch effort to squelch funding, we'll win that battle."

For the continuation of the beach funding in past years, he gave due credit to his retired predecessor, Congressman Jim Saxton.

"I understood from him and from lots of people in this room the importance of ongoing beach replenishment, not just to save a few really nice houses, but to save an entire economy and a lot of communities."

Matters of Transportation and Fishing Regulation

The Causeway Bridge is at the center of advocacy for Southern Ocean County at the state level, Adler outlined. He said he had been working with state legislators and Ocean County officials to "make sure Gov. Corzine and the DOT (Department of Transportation) understand there are critical issues affecting Ocean County, most critical of which, I think, long-term, is to

get a second bridge span."

Adler continued, "When I met with folks on the Island back in December, they told me their number one issues, as much as beach replenishment was critical, was to get a second bridge. To make the first bridge safe- to get it fixed and to get a second bridge, not that gets built in the year 2015 and with delays in construction finally is finished in 2019, but actually gets started quickly.

After he and 9th District Assemblyman Christopher J. Connors met with Corzine on the issue, Adler came away with the conclusion "I think he gets it."

A timely rebuilding of the bridge system is critical "not only for safety if we ever have to evacuate the Island in times of a terrible storm or other disaster, but for the economic engine that the Island provides for the entire region," Adler said.

Another issue regarding transportation was brought up by Dick Jeffries of the Long Beach Island Business Alliance. Jeffries pitched his crusade to make Long Beach Boulevard two ways north and south at the Ship Bottom circle, a call that is echoed by the Joint Council of Taxpayers Associations of Long Beach Island.

Jeffries told about the "dangerous" route of "cutting across three lanes of traffic" to navigate the circle from north to south." He said, "We have a problem that could be solved very quickly and with very little money... so we could just go back and forth on the Boulevard instead of around this weird, convoluted thing that we go through now."

"Honestly, it's the first time I've heard of the issue," Adler answered, and he asked a few more questions. "If you'll have the mayor call me," he said, referring to Ship Bottom Mayor William Huelsenbeck, "he and I talk a lot. He's got my cell phone number. I'll coordinate with him and whomever else we have to, to get involved. I'm happy to try to help."

Fishing and aquaculture also reached Adler's ears in the four questions he answered at length before it was time to head to another appointment.

Rick Bushnell of ReClam the Bay expressed frustration over roadblocks to aquaculture that he said he had experienced from the federal Army Corps of Engineers and the state Department of Environmental Protection.

"The Army Corps of Engineers doesn't get it, the DEP doesn't get it; they're out of touch with what's happening with aquaculture in the United States now," charged Bushnell, who said the Corps is allowing more aquaculture south and north of our area.

Adler responded, "There's no reason why we shouldn't redeem the bay in a positive way for shellfish, make it a vibrant part of the economy again. The corps could be a positive force in this rather than an obstacle, the way I think they are right now. I'll work with you in that." Ocean fishing is a separate issue, Adler said.

"The Magnuson-Stevens Act is really obnoxious, what it does in terms of setting artificially high thresholds of how much fish have to be out there before you're allowed to catch their stock," said the Congressman, mentioning a brewing issue over summer flounder.

"We're trying aggressively to amend that law federally and get science behind it. I'm working with Congressman Pallone, with people from the Recreational Fishing Alliance, people from the Jersey Cost Anglers Association and the commercial boats...to try and make it make sense for our regional economy and for the country.

"Be patient, we'll get that right."

An e-mail contact link for Adler is found on his website, <http://adler.house.gov>